Work Project:

VITAMIMOS:

CHILDREN TAKE CONTROL OVER NUTRITION

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Abstract

Vitamimos is a social enterprise focused on making people healthier, through the promotion of healthy eating habits, cooking and exercise.

This paper aims to develop a positioning strategy for the company using management skills to help Vitamimos decide on its priorities and next steps. Through an analysis of the company’s activities and development, it was possible to understand its main issues and make the necessary recommendations.

The objective is to increase Vitamimos' sustainability, enabling it to succeed and potentially be replicated, while maximising its social impact.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, strategic positioning, nutrition, obesity
Purpose of the project

The Social Entrepreneurship Institute (IES) uses a research methodology called ES+ to research and map social entrepreneurship initiatives with a high potential in terms of social and environmental transformation and it is used as a first step for the empowerment and training of local stakeholders to maximise their impact and capacity to act\textsuperscript{1}. Under this methodology, IES chose Vitamimos as an ES+ initiative, due to its high social impact, as it presented an innovative way of empowering children to take control of their own nutrition. However, this initiative is still taking its first steps and IES identified a few challenges in terms of strategy that needed to be addressed.

Therefore, the aim of this work project is to identify the barriers and weaknesses in the company's performance and present a series of recommendations to the company, following a careful analysis of its activity in order to improve its general performance.

\textsuperscript{1} Information obtained from http://www.ies.oeg.pt
Literature Review

The issue of fighting obesity

Following the approval of the European Charter against Obesity in Istanbul, in November 2006, Portugal created a Consulting Council for the Obesity Platform (Plataforma Contra a Obesidade)\(^\text{2}\), with the purpose of “contributing in a coordinated and multi-sectorial manner to achieving a reduction of the problem of obesity in Portugal”\(^\text{3}\). This approval brought to debate a problem which was finally recognized as a severe challenge for public health in Europe, including Portugal, where, according to a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO), in 2007, the percentage of obese and pre-obese children, eleven years-old and younger, in 2002 and 2003, were: 10.3% for boys and 12.3% for girls in terms of obesity and 19.1% for girls and 21.4% for boys in terms of pre-obesity. From these observations, the Council reached the conclusion that obesity could be considered as an epidemic, originating from “the quick changes in social, economic and environmental determinants in people’s lifestyles”\(^\text{4}\). Thus, the WHO defined the main guiding principles: an action linked to the strategies defined, balancing the responsibilities of the civil society within each country’s cultural context, enabling the construction of partnerships between all the interested parties; namely the government, the civil society, the private sector, professional networks, the media and international

\(^{2}\) Information on “Plataforma Contra a Obesidade” on http://www.plataformacontraobesidade.dgs.pt

\(^{3}\) Information obtained from www.anmp.pt

\(^{4}\) http://www.anmp.pt
organizations at all levels (national, regional and local). By reaching these objectives, the Platform took on the commitment of preventing and controlling obesity in Portugal, with a strategy that would enable simultaneously economic competitiveness and growth in the country, through health improvement, but also through other sectors linked to agriculture, environment, culture or professional qualifications. Out of these platform, initiatives appeared such as RFE (Regime da Fruta Escolar), a programme which provides the distribution of fruit and vegetables to all primary school students in public schools as well as the organisation of school activities directed at the development of skills in terms of healthy eating and food.

**Strategic positioning within social entrepreneurship:**

Auerswald describes the creation of social value as “the creation of benefits or reduction of costs for society through efforts to address societal needs and problems, in ways that go beyond the private gains and general benefits of market activity” and states that this can also be done by “engaging activities that have an impact that extends beyond what they are immediately doing”, that is to say, the impact that entrepreneurs will ultimately have on governance, as he believes “it is precisely the failure of governments that creates opportunities for social entrepreneurs”.

5 http://www.euro.who.int
6 http://www.gppaa.min-agricultura.pt; Estratégia Nacional: Regime de Fruta Escolar
For Bornstein and Davis\(^8\), planning comes as an essential tool for a social enterprise to be successful as “working from a plan can multiply an organisation’s effectiveness”, although “social organisations often neglect this process”, one barrier being the shortage of human capital in the venture with specific training in business, as well as the fact that the final impact is to create social change, rather than simply generate profit.

CIVICUS’ toolkit for strategic planning\(^9\) provides a basic structure for this, based on five simple questions: (1) Who are we? (2) What skills do we have and what can we do? (3) What problems are we solving? (4) What critical issues do we need to attend to? (5) Where should we place our resources and which are our priorities?

On the National Minority AIDS Council Strategic Planning framework\(^10\), the structure of a strategic plan is divided as follows: First of all, the development of the mission and vision statements. Secondly, undertaking an environmental assessment to gather up-to-date information about the organisation’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and general performance. Then, a development of strategies, goals and objectives – what will be referred to in this work project as “the Strategic Positioning Plan”: “an outline of the organisation’s strategic directions – general strategies, long-term range goals and specific objectives of its response to critical issues”.

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Vitamimos: The Company

Vitamimos is a social enterprise, born out of a challenge launched by the entrepreneurial ideas contest DNA Cascais\textsuperscript{11}, having been awarded with the first place in the Health category, on June 10, 2009, in the first Business Ideas Competition in Cascais. It consists on an innovative project with the main aim of intervening in the prevention of child obesity through the promotion of healthy eating habits. Since April 2011, the company has been based at the Vitamimos Nutritional Centre, in Quinta da Alagoa, Carcavelos.

The company is owned by Ana Quintas, a full-time primary school teacher and has adopted the mission of promoting new habits, behaviour and a healthy lifestyle in terms of nutrition and exercise. Having started at the CEO’s school and then with activities spread around schools in the district, the company now works from the Nutritional Centre in Quinta da Alagoa, Carcavelos and from schools (with the initiative “Vitamimos Vai à Escola”).

The company has set out to intervene in the prevention of child obesity by promoting healthy lifestyles, using educational workshops with school groups, cooking classes, exercise events, birthday parties.

The company’s activities include a cafeteria which serves healthy meals and where clients can consult a nutritionist while having their meal; theme parties with healthy food.

\textsuperscript{11} The business idea competition DNA Cascais is an initiative to capture business ideas and facilitate access to financing sources, created by the DNA Cascais agency, with the strategic goal of turning the Cascais district more dynamic. The competition promotes ideas or projects it finds innovative in various sectors, and with which it foresees the creation or reinforcement of companies with strong innovation content and/or small-scale emerging businesses. The selection of the winning ideas is based on the following criteria: innovation; viability; economic, social and environmental impact; adequateness of the team to the project. (http://www.dnacascais.pt).
cooked by the participants as well as entertainment; workshops (Eco-Chefs)\textsuperscript{12} organised both in the Centre and at schools on healthy eating habits and the basics of cooking; catering for business events through the organisation of coffee breaks with healthy food and merchandising (kitchen appliances directed at children, clothes and aprons).

Following this clear need for further responses to the fight against child obesity and the recognition of this issue as a severe and present issue in Portuguese society, the Vitamimos initiative appeared as a unique and convenient social entrepreneurial initiative, as it presented a clear social mission and an innovative flair, with creative and innovative activities and a constant optimisation of the company’s portfolio, as well as a high potential in terms of social impact, proven through positive results and feedback from the community it works with, as well as a high potential in terms of being replicated in other regions or even countries.

\textsuperscript{12} Eco-Chefs are workshops on healthy eating habits with the aim of promoting quality of living through the adoption of healthy eating and practices that defend environmental sustainability.
Methodology

The project was organised through data collection during five meetings with CEO, Ana Quintas, meetings with the IES and visits to the Nutritional Centre and analysis of the data supplied by the company through the use of business tools such as checking lists and a SWOT analysis. Also, a literature review on social entrepreneurship and business skills for start-ups in terms of strategic positioning and dealing with financial limitations was used as a preparation tool.

The meetings with Vitamimos followed a semi-organised structure: the first meeting had the objective of clarifying the company’s activity, goals and main barriers. The second, to clarify any lack of information faced during the analysis of the company’s activities. The third, to analyse what the company is willing to do in the future and how it felt about every single activity in order to structure them and take a decision in terms of the company’s focus. Then, it was necessary to organise a follow-up meeting, as the company lost some flexibility in terms of the employees’ availability and its objectives had to be reassessed (the CEO was given the opportunity to work part-time at the school, but this was later revoked). Finally, a week after the opening of the Nutritional Centre, a final meeting was held to go through the conclusions and the company’s first week with a new activity – the Cafeteria.

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13 The SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool used to assess the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats involved in a business venture, by specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that can benefit or hinder the venture’s success.
Results

After the analysis of the data provided by the company on their activities, I found a series of issues and limitations to the company’s strategic positioning. First of all, there is a clear financial limitation: there is no financial sustainability or planning which enables the company to assume its volunteers as part- or full-time paid employees. Secondly, there is an evident problem in terms of human resources: besides a cleaning lady and two interns (in the nutrition and food preparation sector), the company has no other full-time employees and none of the volunteers have a link to Vitamimos which assures continuity and reliability, placing its activities at risk. The structure of the team\textsuperscript{14} raises a clear need for someone to work at the cafeteria full-time, to free the interns and direct them towards educational tasks, the core of the company’s activities, rather than focusing on food preparation and the management of the cafeteria.

In terms of the company’s strengths and weaknesses (see Appendix 3), I have identified the following strengths: a multi-talented team with an abundance of motivation and commitment; potential for growth and success; positive feedback from clients and the community of Cascais; uniqueness in terms of supply and a proven social impact as proven, for instance, through the initiative “Blogue da Sopa”\textsuperscript{15} and the fact that the Nutritional Centre works as an excellent promotional tool. In terms of weaknesses, I identified a clear lack of focus (the company is accumulating activities rather than

\textsuperscript{14} The team comprises two interns partially paid by the Portuguese government, through the Professional Training and Employment Institute (IEFP): a nutritionist and a specialist in food preparation, who work 40 hours per week; the CEO’s sister, who deals with management and financial tasks; two volunteers, who deal with educational tasks; Ana Quintas, the CEO, who organizes most of the workshops.

\textsuperscript{15} Blogue da Sopa is a Vitamimos initiative through a blog (http://blogdasopa.blogs.sapo.pt/) where it publishes feedback on Soup Workshops held at schools and where readers can share experiences.
optimising those it already has), limited resources (both financially and in terms of human resources), no full-time links with some of the key staff, no clear target; no set timeline or planning and no previous experience in business and the fact that the cafeteria and catering for business events could be a threat in terms of social impact.

As far as opportunities are concerned, I have identified a clear recognition of obesity as an epidemic, which defines a need for the company’s business and the community’s interested in its activities, proven by the success of its workshops. Also, the need for the company’s business is identified by the point above, and there is a proven interest by the community in undertaking activities to become healthier.

Finally, in terms of threats, I identified the easiness of replication, a negative economic conjuncture that could have an impact in terms of external support and funding. As well as this, the existence of an economic slowdown which might hinder the company’s access to funding and clients, the existence of new competition, with the creation of similar workshops on healthy eating, and the current governmental policies, which are adverse to some of the company’s efforts, namely the CEO’s attempt to free herself from her full-time job.

Therefore, I have identified the need to gain focus through a clear structure, the creation of an organisation chart and the inclusion of full-time paid staff at all levels. As well as this, it is important that the company defines a clear target market. Does it want to reach children, their parents and the elderly? In the case of children, what age range should it focus on? Furthermore, in terms of the projects, it is evident that the CEO has a lot of innovative and potentially successful ideas, but it is important to define what are the main projects and which ones should be prioritised among others, so as not to lose focus.
(1) Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives involve linking the mission to the vision. In other words, how can Vitamimos turn its strategy into a case of success? This is crucial, as the mission is the most important part of a social company: without a social mission, a company cannot be social, thus it becomes essential to assure social revenue from the company’s activities. Another essential element under strategic objectives is the assurance that all the external participants understand the mission and vision of the company so that they can act in compliance with the same goal.

Therefore, it becomes necessary for Vitamimos to: (1) remember at all times why it does what it does, i.e. fitting its actions within the mission; (2) prioritise activities which make the company financially sustainable, balancing revenue with social impact - in other words, taking advantage of their potential for profit; (3) identify opportunities for growth and innovation which provide it with a competitive advantage; (4) maintain the lowest level of financial commitment possible, thus eliminating unnecessary risks; (5) analyse the impact it has on its target, keeping the aim of serving people and (6) form public opinion, creating an image and reputation.

As a conclusion, in terms of Vitamimos’ strategic objectives, it becomes essential for the company to consider the effects that its activities have on the company’s mission, by

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16 See Appendix 1 for a more detailed timeline

considering the obvious effect, but also the secondary effect. The alignment with the mission is only temporary, and so, the company should be prepared to respond to changed and to look for synergies, educating clients and partners to maximise the company’s potential. Even if profit is an essential element for the survival of the company, the mission and intended social impact should never be left out.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Recommendations:}

To comply with these requirements, I recommend a clear structuring of the activities, prioritising the ones that provide the most social impact and have the least cost. The workshops come as the core of the company’s activity and should always be kept as one of its priorities, while the cafeteria could be used as a marketing tool, and the business events as a “cash cow”\textsuperscript{19} to fund other activities, such as free events in public schools.

Secondly, because planning activities is essential to succeed\textsuperscript{20}, taking advantage of the school calendar and school holidays comes as a necessary measure to create customised events, such as summer camps and days at the Centre. Here, constant innovation is necessary, to optimise the potential of the products and services supplied. To do this, there needs to be a constant update of skills and methods in terms of the team involved. To reach the needed productivity, the team will need to have some sort of link with the company and have remuneration, either as a set salary or compensation.

\textsuperscript{18} Bass, Josey (2010)

\textsuperscript{19} In business, a cash cow is typically a business unit that generates unusually high profit in a way that it becomes responsible for a company’s operating profit, meaning that the excess profit from this unit can be used by the business for other purposes. The concept was created by the Boston Consulting Group, on the BCG growth-share matrix used by analysts to evaluate companies.

\textsuperscript{20} Bass, Josey (2010)
Finally, to ensure that the desired social impact is being met, each initiative should be analysed using a checking list to help ensuring its acts in compliance with the company’s mission.21

Finding a strategy, facing the existing opportunities

To find a strategy that fits the current context, it is essential that the company has a list of guiding principles and that all stakeholders share a mindset. The list should have a maximum of six principles22 and could include some of the following:

- The role of the employees and the CEO: are the employees means to an end or do they integrate the community?
- The community: what is the relation between the company and the community?
- Finance: What are the objectives in terms of profit? What benefits is the company willing to give its employees?
- Governance: In what way is the company accountable for its actions?
- Decision-making: Who makes the decisions, where does the company look for advice and consensus?
- Personal development: In what way is the company a vessel for personal development?

What is this spirit found in the workplace?

- Public policy: Will the company become the voice for a specific issue?

- Measuring impact: How does it measure impact and how does it define success?

21  Checklists are commonly-used business tools and can adapt to several stages of the business. I used the website http://www.entrepreneur.com to look for checklists that would apply to Vitamimos and found many examples. I found Princeton Research’s checklist for new ideas particularly useful (Appendix 2).

22  Bass, Josey (2010)
Mission and Vision

As mentioned above, checking that the mission and the vision fit is a task that should be performed continuously by the company. For this purpose, I recommend the use of a checklist created by the For Impact Organisation\textsuperscript{23} which could be adapted in the following manner:

a) Why do we do what we do and how do we do it?

b) Do we think big? Do we keep it simple? Do we act immediately?

c) What have we done and not done and why/why not?

d) Are we acting in compliance with our vision, message and goals?

e) In what way are we constantly optimising?

f) Do the employees understand the company’s vision and mission? Do we have the ideal team, who assumes tasks matching their skills?

After analysing the company using the checklist above, the company can then rethink and assess its development, assuring that the social impact becomes a long-term goal, through a business plan which enables it to draw an action plan, support the acquisition of resources, measure and monitor its performance and help establish partnerships. To define its social impact, Vitamimos first needs to define the social problem involved, which has already been done, since its inception. Afterwards, it is important to develop a social impact model on how it can be successful, through the identification of

\textsuperscript{23} For Impact (http://www.forimpact.org) is an organization which helps non-profits “fund their visions through training, coaching and consulting. It is part of the Suddes Group, founded by Tom Suddes in 1983, after having served as Director of Development at the University of Notre Dame and after having founded 11 companies in various sectors. “We launched For Impact in 2001 as a way to share and scale the impact we had working with organizations and one-on-one. Through For Impact, our blog and our Online Videos, we share our complete approach and frameworks”.

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indicators. Then, it is possible to develop an operating model, defining how the activities will enable the company to act in compliance with its mission and thus develop social impact strategies through the identification of core actions such as the workshops on healthy eating habits, as mentioned above.

(2) Short-term goals:

I have defined the following short-term goals for Vitamimos. First of all, to get the Nutritional Centre running at full-steam with an organised calendar and schedule, taking full advantage of the opportunity to run until 11pm, rather than 6pm, to make the most of the Summer season. Secondly, to plan school activities for the following year, in order to be able to contact private schools and secure long-term contracts that will enable it to fund activities with private schools. Thirdly, to plan a marketing action for the government and organisations it wants to contact, mainly through specialised activities organised at the Nutritional Centre. Then, to create a mailing list for institutions, companies and decision-makers and to hire someone that can be solely responsible by the cafeteria, in order for the team to focus more on the core activity.

24 According to the Root Cause association (http://www.rootcause.org), the social impact model is a tool used to articulate an organisation’s hypothesis about the best way to address a target social problem, as well as the actions the entrepreneur takes to test and measure that hypothesis, while working towards an enduring solution. “As such, it provides the framework that will guide all the work carried out by the organization, at least over the three-to-five year time frame of the business plan. Root Cause’s Social Impact Model blends the big-picture thinking of the theory of change and the step-by-step reasoning of the logic model, and adds a feedback loop that enables organizations to continually improve their performance.”
(3) Long-term goals

I have defined the following long-term goals: firstly, setting up contracts with private schools that enable the company to have a long-term link with them, promoting a possible inclusion of healthy eating courses on the educational programme. Secondly, to integrate the Lisbon and Cascais cultural agendas with several specialised activities for children aged 6-10. Thirdly, to be involved in business and organisational events, using this opportunity merely to fund other activities, through one-off offers rather than long-term agreements (as this is not a priority in terms of the company's portfolio). Finally, to assure that all employees are linked with the company with the possibility of having regular volunteers that can be compensated with benefits according to their performance.
Conclusion

After an analysis of the company and its portfolio, it was clear that Vitamimos was facing a series of issues that were hindering its progress and chances of achieving sustainability. A clear financial limitation prevented the CEO to have a team of full-time paid employees, while the lack of human resources with experience and knowledge in the sector was likely to be holding back its progress. Despite a project that has a clear social impact, innovative flair, and that responds to an objective need, the company showed a lack of focus, piling up new ideas rather the concentrating on the ones they already had, as well as no clear idea about their next steps for the next few years and the danger that, by focusing on a new activity – the cafeteria at the Nutritional Centre – the company could be shifting away from their mission and values.

To assure a sustained growth and provide the company with an organised basis, I have created a Strategic Plan with a timeline of three years, divided in (1) Strategic Objectives, (2) Short-term goals and (3) Long-term goals. Firstly, I recommend that the company evaluates all its activities and prioritise that ones that are closer to its mission and vision, have less risk and are more profitable. Here, I identified the healthy cooking workshops as the core activity, suggesting that the company could base its focus on this unit and consolidating it before taking on any new ideas. Because it already opened the cafeteria, it will be difficult to cancel it, although I believe this poses a risk of shifting its focus from its main activity. However, it has proven to be a great marketing tool and the inclusion of consultations with a nutritionist during meals shows some alignment with the mission and vision.
Secondly, I defined a series of short-term goals for the company, which include the prioritising of the nutritional centre with the organisation of further workshops, while planning for the next school year, through an anticipated securing of long-term contracts with private schools (which can then fund agreements with public schools).

Thirdly, I enumerated a set of long-term goals for Vitamimos, which included the securing of a long-term link with schools, envisaging a possible inclusion of the Eco-Chef programme in the educational programme as an available course for students. Also, I suggested the integration of the company’s activities in the cultural agendas of Lisbon and Cascais, promoting activities directed at children aged 6-10 and the assurance of a full-time link to all staff, to ensure reliability and motivation.

Overall, I have concluded that the key aspect in the restructuring of Vitamimos is focusing on a core activity.

Overall, this project has enabled me to gain more knowledge about social entrepreneurship and the difference between managing a business towards the creation of social value and managing a business towards the creation of economic value. In terms of added-value, I believe that the use of management tools such as checklists for the assessment of the venture and new products can be of use to other social ventures and lead to the creation of widespread similar tools which can be useful to optimise the performance of other businesses with the purpose of achieving social value.
Reference


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>Assessing activities through social impact tools;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deciding on a plan of primary and secondary activities;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create a full-time that will only be linked to the cafeteria.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Calendar for next school year;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second year</td>
<td>Long-term links with private schools;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Possible inclusion of Eco-Chefs as part of the school programme;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrating cultural agendas with customised events;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>All staff should have a clear task and remuneration system by now.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The CEO should be able to be a full-time worker at her company</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third year</td>
<td>Consolidate links with schools and consider other educational institutions;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create impact measuring tools;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have an organised portfolio of activities that can be used as a business</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>plan/marketing tool.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Idea Evaluation Checklist by Princeton Creative Research

List of questions used to evaluate new ideas for products/activities.

- Have you considered all the advantages or benefits of the idea? Is there a real need for it?
- Have you pinpointed the exact problems or difficulties your idea is expected to solve?
- Is your idea an original, new concept, or is it a new combination or adaptation?
- What immediate or short-range gains or results can be anticipated? Are the projected returns adequate? Are the risk factors acceptable?
- What long-range benefits can be anticipated?
- Have you checked the idea for faults or limitations?
- Are there any problems the idea might create? What are the changes involved?
- How simple or complex will the idea's execution or implementation be?
- Could you work out several variations of the idea? Could you offer alternative ideas?
- Does your idea have a natural sales appeal? Is the market ready for it? Can customers afford it? Will they buy it? Is there a timing factor?
- What, if anything, is your competition doing in this area? Can your company be competitive?
- Have you considered the possibility of user resistance or difficulties?
- Does your idea fill a real need, or does the need have to be created through promotional and advertising efforts?
- How soon could the idea be put into operation?
Appendix 3: SWOT Analysis

**Strengths**
- Multi-talented team
- Plenty of motivation and commitment
- Potential for growth and success
- Positive feedback
- Unique supply
- Proven social impact
- Centre as a promotional tool

**Weaknesses**
- Lack of focus
- Limited financial and HR resources
- No full-time links with key employees
- No clear target
- No timeline or planning
- No previous experience in business
- Cafeteria and catering business could be a threat in terms of social impact.

**Opportunities**
- Recognition of obesity as epidemic
- Clear need for the company’s business
- Community is interested in the activities

**Threats**
- Easy to replicate
- Economic slowdown
- Adverse governmental policies
- New competition